

**U.S. Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management
Royal Gorge Field Office
3028 E. Main Street
Canon City, CO 81212**

CATEGORICAL EXCLUSION

NUMBER: DOI-BLM-CO-200-2013-071 CX

CASEFILE/PROJECT NUMBER (optional):

PROJECT NAME: Zion Mountain Thinning and Mistletoe Sanitation.

PLANNING UNIT: Arkansas River Subregion #1

LEGAL DESCRIPTION: Sixth Principle Meridian, T. 9 S., R. 80 W., Sec. 11 & 12

APPLICANT: BLM

DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSED ACTION: The Proposed Action is to mechanically thin approximately 52 acres of small diameter lodgepole pine using conventional logging equipment through fuelwood, post and pole, or timber sale contracting. The objectives of this proposal are to reduce ladder fuels by removing small lodgepole pine; improve forest health by reducing the forest tree density and remove mistletoe infected trees; maintain and increase forest age class diversity; improve wildlife habitat by improving the understory plant species vigor; reduce bark beetle risk; remove fresh bark beetle attacks; and reduce chances of a sustained canopy wildfire by creating gaps in the forest canopy therefore protecting the water quality, soils, and nearby homes.

The treatment would involve thinning from below by mainly removing smaller trees but also removing larger unhealthy trees such as those with dwarf mistletoe, under mountain pine beetle attack, or with declining crowns. The large healthy trees would be reserved while maintaining a representation of all species and sizes. The work would be completed with chainsaws, skidders or tractors, small log trucks or trailers on slopes less than 35%. Slash from all units shall be piled, lopped and scattered, chipped or removed as biomass. Piles created to be burned need to be a minimum of 6 feet in diameter and 6 feet in height.

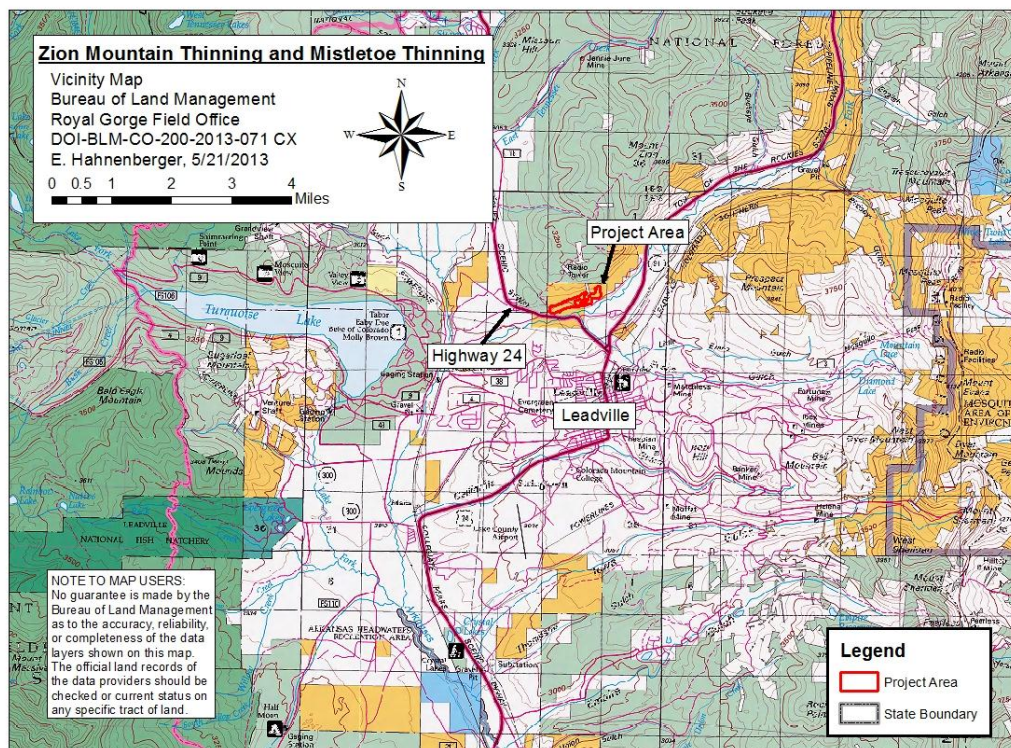
The Zion Mountain Thinning and Mistletoe Sanitation unit is located 1 mile north of Leadville Colorado, along Highway 24. Access to this treatment area would be across BLM lands from Highway 24. A previous forestry salvage project occurred in this area in FY10 removing mountain pine beetle killed trees on approximately 25 acres. No new open permanent roads would be created by this proposal. All temporary roads created for access and forest product removal would be closed upon completion of the treatment. Road closures would be done with natural surrounding materials such as large rocks or logs, tank traps, buck and rail fences where

appropriate, and posted as closed to vehicle access. Treatments and hauling of forest products will be done when the ground is either frozen or dry to prevent soil and road damage. Operators would be required to stop work during the wet periods. Temporary access roads, major skid trails and landings will be reseeded after project completion with native seed.

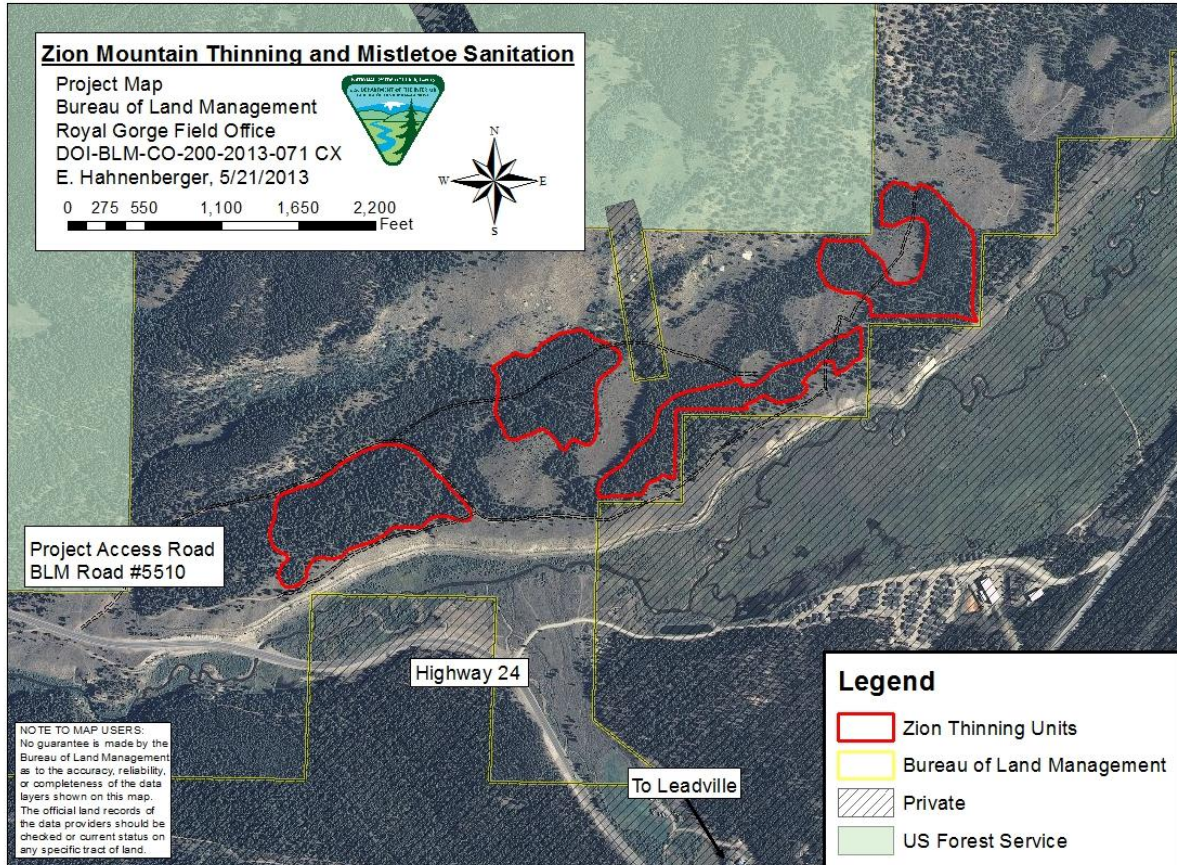
The forests in these areas are characterized as second growth lodgepole pine with heavy mistletoe. Trees were harvested from these areas during the settlement of the nearby town of Leadville around the time minerals were discovered and the railroad was built. Trees infected with dwarf mistletoe and under mountain pine beetle attack would be a priority for removal. Dwarf mistletoe is a parasitic plant that takes moisture and nutrients from the tree causing stunted form and premature death. Current forest densities in the project area are ideal for a bark beetle epidemic or catastrophic wildfire. There are numerous studies that conclude that thinning can reduce bark beetle risk.

There are no active grazing allotments in the project area at this time, therefore there will be no impacts to any grazing operation. All known improvements such as property corners shall be protected from the thinning activity.

Vicinity Map:



Project Map:



PLAN CONFORMANCE REVIEW:

Name of Plan: Royal Gorge Resource Management Plan

Date Approved: 05/13/96

Decision Number: 1-1, 1-14, 1-15

Decision Language: Vegetation management will be as follows: vegetation will be managed to accomplish other BLM initiatives i.e., riparian, wildlife, etc.; management of forest lands will be for enhancement of other values. Productive forested lands will be managed for sustained yield. A portion of the forested lands will be available for intensive management.

CATEGORICAL EXCLUSION REVIEW: This proposed action is listed as a Categorical Exclusion in DOI Departmental Manual Part 516 Chapter 11.9 (C7). None of the following exceptions in 516 DM 2, Appendix 2, apply.

Exclusion Criteria	YES	NO
1. Have significant impacts on public health or safety.		X
2. Have significant impacts on such natural resources and unique geographic characteristics as historic or cultural resources; park, recreation, or refuge lands; wilderness areas; lands with wilderness characteristics; wild or scenic rivers; national natural landmarks; sole or principal drinking water aquifers; prime farmlands; wetlands; floodplains; national monuments; migratory birds; and other ecologically significant or critical areas.		X
3. Have highly controversial environmental effects or involve unresolved conflicts concerning alternative uses of available resources.		X
4. Have highly uncertain and potentially significant environmental effects or involve unique or unknown environmental risks.		X
5. Establish a precedent for future action or represent a decision in principle about future actions with potentially significant environmental effects.		X
6. Have a direct relationship to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant environmental effects.		X
7. Have significant impacts on properties listed, or eligible for listing, on the National Register of Historic Places as determined by either the bureau or office.		X
8. Have significant impacts on species listed, or proposed to be listed, on the List of Endangered or Threatened Species, or have significant impacts on designated Critical Habitat for these species.		X
9. Violate a Federal law, or a State, local or tribal law or requirement imposed for the protection of the environment.		X
10. Have a disproportionately high and adverse effect on low income or minority populations.		X
11. Limit access to and ceremonial use of Indian sacred sites on Federal lands by Indian religious practitioners or significantly adversely affect the physical integrity of such sacred sites.		X
12. Contribute to the introduction, continued existence, or spread of noxious weeds or non-native invasive species known to occur in the area or actions that may promote the introduction, growth, or expansion of the range of such species.		X

INTERDISCIPLINARY TEAM REVIEW			
NAME	TITLE	AREA OF RESPONSIBILITY	Initials/date
Matt Rustand	Wildlife Biologist	Terrestrial Wildlife, T&E, Migratory Birds	MR, 3/18/2014
Jeff Williams	Range Management Spec.	Range, Vegetation, Farmland	NA
Chris Cloninger	Range Management Spec.	Range, Vegetation, Farmland	NA
John Lamman	Range Management Spec.	Weeds	JL, 03/21/2014
Dave Gilbert	Fisheries Biologist	Aquatic Wildlife, Riparian/Wetlands	DG, 3/14/14
Stephanie Carter	Geologist	Minerals, Paleontology, Waste Hazardous or Solid	SSC, 3/24/14
Melissa Smeins	Geologist	Minerals, Paleontology	-----
John Smeins	Hydrologist	Hydrology, Water Quality/Rights, Soils	JS, 3/17/14
Ty Webb	Prescribed Fire Specialist	Air Quality	TW, 3/13/2014
Jeff Covington	Cadastral Surveyor	Cadastral Survey	JC, 3/14/14
Kalem Lenard	Outdoor Recreation Planner	Recreation, Wilderness, LWCs, Visual, ACEC, W&S Rivers,	KL, 3/17/2014
John Nahomenuk	River Manager	Recreation, Wilderness, LWCs, Visual, ACEC, W&S Rivers	NA
Ken Reed	Forester	Forestry	3/5/14
Monica Weimer	Archaeologist	Cultural, Native American	NA
Michael Troyer	Archaeologist	Cultural, Native American	MDT, 5/30/2014
Vera Matthews	Realty Specialist	Realty	NA
Rich Rotte	Realty Specialist	Realty	RR,8/26/14
Steve Cunningham	Law Enforcement Ranger	Law Enforcement	NA
Patrick Seekins	Fire Management Officer	Fire	PS, 4/16/2014

REMARKS:

Cadastral Services: The section lines in the proposed work area were surveyed in 1879. The PLSS GCDB point reliability within the project area is +/- 80 ft. The proposed work areas are near several PLSS corners which control public land boundaries that will need monument protection in order to preserve the significant survey evidence. These PLSS corners are the controlling corner for the subdivision of the sections. From our records sections 11 and 12 have not been subdivided. Mineral claims MS 3369 (unpatented claim) and MS 13776 (patented claim) were both surveyed in 1900 and are located in section 11. These mineral claims currently do not have GCDB data collected for them. Based on the survey plats for these claims the land status in section 11 is incorrect and a portion of the project falls within the mineral claims including the patented mineral claim MS 13776 which is private land. With this being said the boundary currently cannot be located without a Cadastral Investigation or Cadastral Survey. Upon request I will provide monument records and coordinates for the corners with bearing trees in the area for the proper monument protection. If any unhealthy bearing trees or line trees with

blazes on them are found within the project area, please cut these trees so that the blaze is still visible and the trunk of the tree remains standing.

Cultural Resources: A total of 13 sites and/or IFs were located during the cultural resources inventory [Report CR-RG-14-107 (P)]. However, only a single resource (5FN820) is considered eligible for inclusion on the National Register of Historic Places. The site possesses integrity and the potential to inform our understanding of the past use of the area. The resource does fall along the boundary of the proposed APE, but will be avoided by all actions. So long as the resource is avoided and preserved, the proposed undertaking will not affect historic properties.

Native American Religious Concerns: No possible traditional cultural properties were located during the cultural resources inventory (see above). There is no other known evidence that suggests the project area holds special significance for Native Americans.

Threatened and Endangered Species: The project area lies within the boundary of a Lynx Analysis Unit (Tennessee Pass); however, vegetation analysis of the area indicates the project area does not lie within lynx habitat. The area is primarily climax lodgepole pine that does not offer the necessary understory characteristics snowshoe hare require the lynx primary food source. The projects proximity to a major highway also reduces the likelihood for lynx to utilize this habitat. As a result, no effect to lynx is expected as a result of the project.

Migratory Birds: To be in compliance with the Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA) and the Memorandum of Understanding between BLM and USFWS required by Executive Order 13186, BLM must avoid actions, where possible, that result in a “take” of migratory birds. Pursuant to BLM Instruction Memorandum 2008-050, to reduce impacts to Birds of Conservation Concern (BCC), no habitat disturbance (removal of vegetation such as timber, brush, or grass) is allowed during the periods of May 15 - July 15, the breeding and brood rearing season for most Colorado migratory birds. The provision will not apply to completion activities in disturbed areas that were initiated prior to May 15 and continue into the 60-day period.

An exception to this timing limitation will be granted if nesting surveys conducted no more than one week prior to vegetation-disturbing activities indicate no nesting within 30 meters (100 feet) of the area to be disturbed. Surveys shall be conducted by a qualified breeding bird surveyor between sunrise and 10:00 a.m. under favorable conditions.

Lands with Wilderness Characteristics: The BLM, Royal Gorge Field Office updated the inventory for lands with wilderness characteristics. The lands affected by the project area do not meet these characteristics therefore this resource would not be affected by the proposed action.

Wastes, Hazardous or Solid: If the project involves oil or fuel usage, transfer or storage, an adequate spill kit and shovels are required to be onsite during project implementation. The project proponent will be responsible for adhering to all applicable local, State and Federal regulations in the event of a spill, which includes following the proper notification procedures in BLM’s Spill Contingency Plan.

Minerals: The federal minerals in the proposed project area are open to mineral location, therefore requiring coordination between surface uses as applicable. If there are unpatented mining claims that are

active in the proposed project location, any associated claim markers encountered during project implementation cannot be disturbed (reference CO-2012-013). As of March 2014, there is a placer claim located within the footprint of the proposed project area.

Realty: No realty issues. There is one recorded right-of-way on public land for the QWEST access road to a Passive Reflector in the on USFS lands.

COMPLIANCE PLAN (optional):

NAME OF PREPARER: Ken Reed

SUPERVISORY REVIEW: Melissa K. S. Garcia

NAME OF ENVIRONMENTAL COORDINATOR: /s/ Martin Weimer

DATE: 9/10/14

DECISION AND RATIONALE: I have reviewed this Categorical Exclusion and have decided to implement the Proposed Action.

This action is listed in the Department Manual as an action that may be categorically excluded. I have evaluated the action relative to the 10 criteria listed above and have determined that it does not represent an exception and is, therefore, categorically excluded from further environmental analysis.

SIGNATURE OF AUTHORIZED OFFICIAL: /s/ Keith E. Berger
Keith E. Berger, Field Manager

DATE SIGNED: 9/18/14